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ABSTRACT

Commentary on cultural differences between the Anglo-American and Spanish-American cultures focuses on food, role playing, division of labor, and the concept of making "-etic" and "-emic" distinctions in culture study. Reference is made analagously to the work of Kenneth Pike, to Howard Nostrand's remarks on Eskimo culture, and to Americo Castro's works on Spanish history. (RL)

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ANGLO AND LATIN: THE CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

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It is commonplace that a citizen of one culture, when transported into another, experiences three stages in his attitude toward the people among whom he now finds himself. First he is charmed by the quaintness of it all; then he suffers the pains of cultural shock, and finally he adjusts to the culture. There is another possibility, though. The initial phase of appreciating the local color may merge in the space of a few days with the first symptoms of cultural shock; then there may follow a period of adjustment in which the foreign visitor learns to appreciate the values of the host culture, and he may then relax into a state of relative contentment tempered by moments of wild frustration. I offer as example of the latter the case of a North American lady who was a well-known educator in one of the republics to the south of the Rio Bravo. When a defeated political party held a rally to celebrate its victory, she said "I never will understand the mentality of these people."

The aim of this paper is to categorize certain cultural traits of our Spanish and Portuguese-speaking neighbors, recognizing that they have the right to do the same to us. In other words, we are seeking a comparison, not a value judgement. We can make a list of the things that they do and the things that we do; we can then weed out non-essentials, which are in effect the differences the foreigner accepts in a relatively short time. What is left are the traits that make the frustrated North American exlaim "I never will understand the mentality of these people."

Americans and Canadians returning from Latin America can give us a long list of observed cultural differences. Mexicans, for example, eat highly spiced food. Argentines, however, eat broiled beef short ribs and green salads, washed down with red wine and yerba, while other peoples consume what unsympathetic Anglos call "the five basic starches." Women keep their own names in marriage. Families are more extended than ours, and at the same time more difficult for the foreigner to know. Few women of the educated classes work outside the home. Time has no meaning. Politics are a personal matter, defended or advocated more emotionally than intellectually. Opposing political parties are reluctant to compromise their differences to vote needed legislation. Meals are at unusual hours. Latin American gesture more than we do. They like bulls and soccer, while we like boxing and football.

Shall we continue: North American students dress informally, while Latin American students dress with care. White-collar workers skimp on food, but their white shirts are freshly laundered and their

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neckties are fully knotted. There is more concern with personal offense than among us. When one calls on a man to discuss business, he must be ready to make small talk for the length of time it takes to consume several cups of coffee and at least two cigarettes. We observe also that skin color is of little importance; -- the legal Brazilian terms preto, mulato, moreno and branco serve to describe one's appearance, not one's social acceptability. Businesses are individual or family affairs, not generally corporations with thousands of shareholders who do not even know each other. As several Latins have told me, they don't feel comfortable sharing authority and responsibility in a business context. We may note as a related phenomenon the reluctance of Latin Americans to pay taxes, as well as their tendency to send money abroad for safekeeping. Latin Americans feel less masters of their destiny than North Americans do. They look more to luck -- witness the proliferation of lotteries -- and are more resigned than we when they suffer misfortune.

I have learned via a returned Peace Corps volunteer of an attempt to start a cooperative among small sugar growers in one South American republic. They abandoned their several small trapiches and maintained the largest and best available. They did their selling and buying as a group, with one truck. They made money, as long as the Peace Corps was there, but as soon as the volunteers left the enterprise fell apart. One volunteer went back to inquire whether anything had gone wrong. "No," was the answer, "but something might go wrong." Many of us have seen, in Argentina, buildings begun under the Perón régime and never finished, although it would be more economical to complete them than to build others. It has occurred to me to connect this phenomenon with another that I observed in Brazil some time before:

A local citizen was praising the governor of his state. He was so popular, my informant declared, that the legislature was considering a constitutional amendment to permit him to stay in office for one year beyond his term. "Why?" I asked. "So he can complete his program." "But why not elect a man of the same party who will finish the job?" "Oh," he answered, "the new governor will have a program of his own."

If we examine the examples of cultural difference that I have given, we conclude that not all of them are equally disturbing to an outsider. We get used to different foods, and men at least are not unduly bothered by a different rôle of women in society. After all, everyone eats, and as long as we get sufficient nourishment of the right kind we can adapt to different schedules and different styles of food preparation. If women do not engage in the same activities in Lima as in Chicago we accept that as well. Every society has established a division of labor based on sex. We may categorize these differences using Kenneth Pike's term etic, as contrasted to emic;[1] in other words, the variations in male-female rôle playing between Anglo-American and Ibero-American cultures are analogous to the variations in pronunciation in an English voiceless stop, dependent on environment. I suggest by this that learning to eat different foods or learning what a Latin-American lady is permitted to do by her culture is little different from learning a second dialect of our native language.

I recognize that I am misrepresenting Pike here for the purpose of making a point. Just as a number of allophones, because of their distribution and phonetic similarity can be subsumed into one distinctive unit of sound, a phoneme, certain cultural traits can be shown to be realizations of one basic cultural concept. These concepts vary from people to people. But just as we can say that the sound [k] belongs to one phoneme in English and to another in Spanish, and recognize that it conveys information in either case, so we can say that certain "etic" similarities in the two cultures may transfer easily. The fact that both Anglo and Latin cultures are representatives of Western civilization facilitates the transfer.

But a number of the differences that I have mentioned cannot be disposed of so easily. It is not within our cultural framework to refuse to complete a valuable work simply because it was started by someone else, nor to abandon a prosperous enterprise on suspicion. We are not likely to go hungry for the sake of appearances, nor do we spend time -- although we call it "wasting time" -- exchanging pleasantries with a busy man when we might be making money and permitting him to do likewise. We expect our legislators to water down controversial bills to the point when everyone is more or less satisfied, or at least reconciled. These are the differences that drive us to distraction. They indicate an <u>emic</u> difference, one so great that it forms a separate division in the way a particular culture organizes itself and the world in which it lives. I return to the analogy of transfer of speech sounds: The problem of learning to recognize an "emic" difference is similar to that of learning two "<u>r</u>-like" sounds in Spanish. If Spanish had only one, we could substitute our own with few adverse effects. The fact that there are two causes a problem. First we have to learn to distinguish the difference, and only then learn to produce the sounds.

In a recent essay, our friend Howard Nostrand[2] has pointed out that every culture has at bottom a number of unexpressed assumptions. These are unexpressed either because they are unrecognized or because the members of a society find it intolerable that one may live without them. I offer the following examples from our culture: Employers in Alaska find that Eskimos make good workers, but tend to leave the job at any time without notice. The Anglo-American organizes his work according to a schedule super-imposed on nature; the Eskimo according to the rhythm of nature. Although the employer may want to finish a project by a certain date, the Eskimo may suddenly take off to hunt seal or caribou; the survival of the community demands that they hunt when the game is there. The job is left unfinished, to the white man's annoyance, and each party is amazed that the other does not understand his point of view. Another example arises from an internal change, and is so current that it may bother some people here present: I refer to the controversy over sex education in the schools -- a question that probably could not have arisen a generation ago. This is a challenge to the traditional Christian belief in the dichotomy of body and soul, the soul being redeemable and the body being evil, although probably neither the proponents nor the opponents of the question are aware of the underlying assumption.

The assumption that I have just mentioned is one that is shared by all of Christendom, as far as I have been able to determine, and insofar as it is being challenged the challenge comes from within. The question of an emic difference between Latin-American and Anglo-American cultures is quite different. It concerns two completely integrated cultural assumptions which have been brought into contrast, if not conflict, by international and inter-cultural contacts.

In his monumental works on Spanish history, Americo Castro[3] has pointed out several cultural traits that separated "old Christians" and "new Christians" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The cristiano viejo was a peasant or a noble warrior; Lope de Vega and Calderón de la Barca, among others, tell us that the transition from the lower socio-economic class to the higher was possible, and the example of an illegitimate swineherd becoming ruler of Peru tells us that the possibility sometimes became a reality. The cristiano viejo, as long as there were cristianos nuevos and moriscos in the country, rarely engaged in any productive enterprise other than agriculture or cattle breeding. The cristiano nuevo, on the other hand, found his niche in commerce and industry, while contributing greatly to the intellectual life of the peninsula. As the latter group found itself more and more isolated from the cristianos viejos, they eventually disappeared as an entity, and with them disappeared from Iberian soil their indigenous economic development -- if I may use a dirty word, their capitalism.

There is no need here to make an item by item comparison of the above traits with the corresponding traits in our Anglo culture, since we live it day by day and are consequently familiar with it, but rather to inquire whether they follow a pattern and incidentally whether they are historically derived. I suggest that the answer to both questions is affirmative. Just as in the United States, where the ethic of a Puritan minority permeated the entire nation, in Latin America the ethic of the cristiano viejo spread to all sectors, regardless of ethnic origin. Let us restate the traits that concern us:

1. The Ibero-American would rather dress well than eat well.

2. He takes offense more easily than we do.

3. He trusts to luck more than we do.

4. He is intransigent in his politics.

5. He doesn't like to cooperate with others.

6. He spends time in idle conversation when we think he should be working.

Do these add up to an emic difference? Yes, they do. Briefly stated, it is this: Our Anglo-American culture judges the worth of a man by what he produces -- and I do not mean exclusively material goods -- while the Ibero-American culture judges him for his individuality, his

uniqueness. Américo Castro has written about the Spaniards of the 16th century that "... los habitantes del imperio español no se unieron unos a otros mediante intereses horizontales, sino en haces de líneas ascendientes que convergían en la creencia -- en el caudillo, en el rey, en Santiago, en Dios. Ni en España ni en Hispanoamérica pudieron entrelazarse las regiones en una red de tareas comunes complementarias..."[4] Elsewhere he writes "El hombre hispano no se sintio mónada aislada cuando se alzó ante él otro hombre que era como él, aunque de calidad mayor y mejor que la suya. De ahí el caudillismo, el caciquismo, y en último término, el mesianismo;"[5] and the last quotation I take from his work is the following: "El español fue el único ejemplo en la historia occidental de un propósito de vida, consciente y sostenido, fundado en la idea de que el único posible y digno oficio para un hombre es ser hombre, y a nada más."[6]

As this organization is dedicated to the study of foreign languages, it seems appropriate here to mention a socio-linguistic datum which confirms my thesis: it is that where English has two concepts for the acquisition of wealth or status, to earn and to win, Spanish has only one: ganar. When we earn something it is implicit that we make some kind of effort, whether we earn a promotion for reorganizing the sales department, or earn a spanking for raiding the jam jar. In Spanish, work is only one way to ganar, and not necessarily the preferred one.

It seems clear that the traits we have enumerated can be subsumed as etic manifestations of one eme. The intrinsic value of the person is of supreme importance. If I am leader, I will not lessen myself by appearing to subordinate myself to another leader; if I lose an election, I may pretend to have won it and, like Don Quijote, defend the right with all the strength of my good right arm. I must maintain a public image consistent with my estimation of myself, like the escudero of Lazarillo de Tormes. If I fall to the point where I must beg, I do so with dignity. My wealthy neighbor respects my dignity. When he gives me a coin, he says "Perdone, hermano." Pardon me, my brother, for being better off than you. It is no fault of yours, and no merit of mine, that our positions are not reversed.

It is very easy for a citizen of one culture to underestimate the citizens of another, and equally difficult to belong to one culture while trying to compare it objectively with another. Let me say here that while cooperation and compromise would probably do a great deal of good to Latin America, respect for all human beings would probably help us Anglos. It is an unusual experience for one of us to live in a community where black people and white people get along without racial friction; the Spaniards and Portuguese, with their imperial ideal, exploited whoever was exploitable, without denying him his humanity. We, on the other hand, in order to justify the slavery that we considered necessary, had to exclude the slave from the human race. And what greater pleasure can there be than to recognize, in the context of Poor Richard's maxim that "time is money", that to the Ibero-American I as

an individual am more important than either. I can think of no better commentary on the complementary values of the two cultures than to quote the late Pedro Salinas, who said: "There is no better place on earth to live than Puerto Rico. There one finds a purely Spanish way of life, protected by the Constitution of the United States."[7]

NOTES

1. Pike, Kenneth L., Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior, second revised edition (The Hague, Mouton, 1967), passim.

2. Nostrand, Howard L., "Describing and Teaching the Sociocultural Context of a Foreign Language and Literature," in Albert Valdman (ed.), Trends in Language Teaching (New York, MacGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 19.

3. This theme appears over and over in the work of Castro; see, for example, Origen, ser y existir de los españoles, De la edad conflictiva, and España en su historia.

4. Castro, Américo, España en su historia (Buenos Aires, Losada, 1948), pp. 611-12.

5. Ibid., p. 619.

6. Ibid., p. 623.

7. Quoted from an informal lecture given at the Johns Hopkins University in 1950.